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of the

Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

on Tuesday, March 19, 2002

by

His Honour

The Honourable A.M. House, C.M., M.D., LL.D., FRCPC

Lieutenant-Governor

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Welcome to the Fourth Session of this, the Forty-Fourth General Assembly. It is my pleasure to welcome all those citizens of the province who are observing these proceedings both here and, for the first time, in their own homes.

Queen's Jubilee

As members of this Honourable House will recall, February 6, 2002 marked the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's accession to the Throne. My Government, on behalf of the citizens of the province, conveys our best wishes to Her Majesty. At the same time, My Government conveys the sympathy of our citizens

Snowdon.

First Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador

We meet in this Chamber at an important point in our history, as this is the first Speech from the Throne to be delivered in the Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland **and Labrador**. Changing the name of the province is a symbolic yet important recognition of Labrador's status as a full partner in the province. It will encourage all citizens to work together to meet the challenges and seize the tremendous opportunities that lie ahead.

The name change, while very real for the people of Labrador, is also symbolic of the changes our province will face in the coming years. It reflects the change My Government has sought to make in how we determine and

meet our commitments. It represents My Government's commitment to foster and manage real change for the benefit of our people.

My Government believes that the next few years will belong to Labrador. A significant part of My Government's agenda will be focused on pursuing opportunities for development in Labrador - development that will be in keeping with the views and aspirations of the people of Labrador. My Government's commitment to develop a Labrador Economic Action Plan, to sign land claims and self-government agreements with Aboriginal groups, to complete all phases of the Trans-Labrador Highway and invest in other strategic infrastructure priorities, and to continue to negotiate a Voisey's Bay deal and pursue the Lower Churchill development are indicative of the tremendous promise and real potential that the Big Land holds.

Commending our People

For many, 2001 will be remembered as a year scarred by the tragedy of September 11th. The events of that day have changed us all. A profound impact was made on people well beyond those who experienced the horror in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. It is said that from tragedy comes hope, and how we respond to such events reflects our spirit and confidence.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador responded to the tragedy as we have responded so many times to crises within our own communities - with compassion and hospitality. Our pride as a people and our tradition of caring shone brightly and I am sure it left an indelible mark on the thousands of unexpected visitors who spent time here. Perhaps John and Marie Unkle of Fairfax, Virginia said it best: *"The wonderful people of Gander and the surrounding community made us feel very welcome and restored our faith in the basic goodness of humanity...You*

opened your homes and hearts to us. We will never forget the people... for their generosity and compassion to total strangers."

Building on our long tradition of giving and helpfulness, it was only fitting that the hard work and commitment to volunteerism in this province be recognized. 2001 was the International Year of the Volunteer, and we were privileged to honour 96 volunteers in this province by presenting them with the Newfoundland and Labrador Volunteer Medal. The Volunteer Medal was an opportunity to recognize people for their generosity, sense of caring and community spirit.

Pride of Place

This year the year that our writers, our film makers and our actors brought our world to millions of people.

A world with a richness in culture and heritage that is unparalleled. How could we ever forget the image created by Bernice Morgan of Mary Bundle, a determined, hard-working, weathered woman, as the entire nation became entranced by the sometimes cruel but binding life of the people of Cape Random. Or the creative, eccentric Phonse, played by our own Andy Jones, in the comedy hit Rare Birds. Or the witty, insightful reporter in The Shipping News as played by our beloved Gordon Pinsent.

These are the characters we know intimately and instinctively. The people we belong to, the people we have come from. The same people that we see every day in corner stores, in post offices, on the community wharf and across the fence. This is indeed a world built on a sense of place and intense pride.

Order of Newfoundland and Labrador

Recognizing outstanding individuals for their talent, vision, unique skills and noteworthy contributions is something My Government wishes to continue to do. To this end, we will advance the establishment of the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador in the coming months. As the first Chancellor of the Order, I will be meeting in the next few weeks with the members of the Advisory Council leading to the nomination process and eventual selection of the first citizens to receive the Order.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

An Open Government

One year ago My Government set out a bold and ambitious work plan to affirm public confidence as it

completes the mandate given in the general election of 1999.

My Government is committed to opening this Government to the people of the province. All Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve to know what their government stands for, what it intends to do and how it will do it. The initiatives which My Government has pursued with intent and focus have had a positive impact on the people of the province. In the past year, My Government has demonstrated that it is willing to be innovative and bold by making, and delivering on, commitments that challenge the status quo.

Accountability through Change and Openness

Building from recommendations developed by an independent review panel, a new *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* was passed. The new Act replaces legislation that was over 20 years old. It ensures clarity and relevance in this new age of information, and is part of My Government's commitment to a greater level of openness and accountability. The priority My Government has placed on this Bill reflects the hallmark of this administration. That hallmark is real accountability. Ensuring real accountability to the people of this province is the foundation from which My Government intends to act in all areas.

My Government believes that the people of this province have the right to view reports and studies commissioned by Government, and to form their own views on Government action on the basis of the advice it receives. To this end, My Government has adopted a policy of openness, of publicly releasing reports and studies

once they are received. My Government believes that, given access to the same information, the majority of fair-minded people would reach the same conclusions as the government. In the last sitting of the House, My Government amended the *House of Assembly Act* to ensure that all reports required to be tabled in the House of Assembly, including the Report of the Auditor General, are released as soon as they are received, whether or not this House is in session.

A further, important change towards real accountability was made with My Government's decision to create a Citizens' Representative for the province. The Citizens' Representative, Mr. Fraser March, was appointed in December past and began work on February first of this year. We now have in this province an individual, empowered by the people's House of Assembly, whose mandate is to address issues relating to government accessibility and personal privacy.

My Government has also established legislation on a new Child and Youth Advocate to advance issues on behalf of children and youth in this province. The new Advocate will be in place in the near future. My Government believes that this legislation will position Newfoundland and Labrador as one of the leaders in child and youth advocacy in Canada.

Another important change My Government has made to ensure real accountability was to televise the activities of this House of Assembly. People in over 126,000 households in every part of this province are able to watch and listen to this speech in the comfort of their own homes. Televising the House has been a critical measure in ensuring that the people of this province can witness, first hand, the deliberations which take place in this chamber and democracy in action.

Overall, these initiatives represent tangible and significant change in how My Government is more open and accountable to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Other Legislative Achievements

In the past year, My Government has demonstrated its action-oriented focus through its sound legislative agenda. In the past year, 60 pieces of legislation have been approved by this House, many of them groundbreaking.

In addition to bringing legislative life to its accountability agenda, My Government has put forward several other pieces of legislation which have been passed by the House of Assembly, including a new *Endangered Species*

Act which will help further protect wildlife in the province; changes to the *Economic Diversification and Growth Enterprises Act*, to further stimulate growth in the province's economy; changes to the *Labour Standards Act*, which will increase the minimum wage and improve labour relations in the province; and changes to the *Petroleum and Natural Gas Act*, to ensure that provincial regulations governing oil and gas development are consistent and fair to the province and to industry.

A Year of Accomplishments

My Government's record of accomplishments in the past year sets the pace for another year of aggressive action. On the economic front, My Government released the final report on the *Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth*, attracted new call centres to St. John's, Corner Brook, Carbonear and Grand Falls-Windsor, signed a 130

recognized with two prestigious international awards for tourism marketing. On the social side of the ledger, My Government reduced tuition at Memorial University by 10 per cent, increased salaries for home support workers, renewed its emphasis on literacy, made provision for support trusts for adult disabled persons to be established by their families and created a provincial Youth Advisory Committee. These are just some of the significant achievements from the past year.

Petroleum Products Pricing Commissioner

My Government also delivered on its commitment to regulate petroleum prices by creating the Office of the Petroleum Products Pricing Commissioner, and by hiring Mr. George Saunders to fulfil this role. Through this Office, My Government has ensured that petroleum prices are set in a rational and fair manner, bringing stability in

pricing to consumers.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Strategic Action Plan

In the past year, My Government has seen a change in leadership, a change towards action and a change in delivering results to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Leadership carries with it the challenge of managing change. My Government believes that in this day and age our people demand a government that is an agent of change, a government that is adaptable, flexible and responsive, a government that listens and is quick to respond and take action.

My Government believes that actions speak louder than words. While we have accomplished a great deal in the past year, there is much more to be done. The right choices must be made if Newfoundland and Labrador is to prosper. My Government, working with and for the people of this great province, will continue to set a bold agenda and attack it with vigour, with confidence and with determination. My Government has a firm plan of action for the future.

Openness and Accountability

First and foremost, My Government is, and will remain, open and accountable to the people. We shall continue to consult widely on priority matters and will debate issues openly to inspire creative thinking and new approaches, not only from Members of this Honourable House, but from among our broad population.

Annual Reports

My Government has a formalized planning process in place which requires departments to develop strategic plans which clarify their mandates, establish their mission, set goals and identify strategic priorities. For Crown boards, agencies and commissions, two documents have been issued: *Achieving Excellence 2000 - A Guidebook for Improved Accountability of Public Bodies* and *Achieving Excellence 2000 - A Handbook for Improved Governance of Public Bodies*. These public body accountability framework documents are another important step in My Government's efforts to implement effective and up to date accountability measures throughout the public sector.

Building on these measures, and on the broad range of actions My Government has already undertaken to ensure real openness and accountability, all Departments and Agencies will be required to publish annual reports in 2003. Through these reports, people may judge the effectiveness of My Government in delivering programs and services that meet the needs of the people.

Strategic Social Plan and Social Audit

My Government has outlined a vision for Newfoundland and Labrador through its Strategic Social Plan. It is a vision that encourages government, regions and communities to work in partnership to improve long-term opportunities for people and identify regional solutions to regional issues. Today, across the province, regional committees are working together to make a difference. They are supporting partnerships that, for example, bring early childhood development opportunities such as family resource programs to rural areas, build community leadership through volunteer development, identify and promote career opportunities for youth in their local regions

and p[illegible]note recreation as a way to build stronger communities. There is an excitement and a vibrance as this Plan makes a real difference in the lives of our people.

My Government is moving forward with its social progress and audit report. The report will begin to measure our social progress, and reflects My Government's commitment to openness and accountability. Newfoundland and Labrador has been recognized both in Canada and abroad for the ingenuity of its Strategic Social Plan. My Government's willingness to work in a different way positions Newfoundland and Labrador as a leader in social development.

Sustaining Rural Newfoundland and Labrador

The strength of rural Newfoundland and Labrador is critical to our growth, sustainability and lifestyle. My Government understands that some regions of the province have not shared equally in our growth and prosperity. My Government will continue to support economic development in rural Newfoundland and Labrador through the 20 Regional Economic Development Boards and other community economic development organizations throughout the province. My Government recognizes that the opportunities and challenges facing one region of the province, such as the Northern Peninsula, are different from those in other regions, such as the South Coast or Labrador. My Government intends to take a flexible approach to building stronger communities and stronger regions.

Last fall's Rural EXPO 2001, the first of its kind, was designed to showcase and promote economic opportunities and business and community economic development accomplishments in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government took the opportunity at Rural EXPO 2001 to present the first Community Economic

Development Awards to individuals and groups in recognition of the valuable role they play in economic development at the community level.

Wilf Sutton and Tom Sutton were selected for the Outstanding Individual Achievement award. These men were instrumental in developing a strategic plan for their hometown of Trepassey. Michelle Snow, who won the Excellence in Youth Leadership award, is an enthusiastic mentor and role model for youth in the province. The Random North Development Association, winner of the Innovation in Education award, has been a driving force in the field of literacy, particularly in bridging the gap from education to employment for individuals who need assistance in upgrading their literacy skills to participate fully in the workforce. These and the other award winners have reason to take pride in their accomplishments.

My Government will continue to support the Regional Economic Development Boards as agents of economic progress and change. My Government is also committed to establishing an agricultural land enhancement fund to further expedite growth in the agriculture sector, particularly in the dairy industry, and My Government will seek matching funds from the federal government to supplement this initiative.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Fostering Partnerships for Growth

Economic opportunity can best be built through the collective commitment of all members of society. Alliances of the many faces which make up our economic and social base are not only useful, but critical.

Strategic Partnership Initiative

That is why My Government recently established a Strategic Partnership Initiative among government, business and labour to foster a new collaborative, consensus-building approach to advancing the socio-economic interests of our province. This partnership is important in advancing My Government's overall economic agenda as set out in the *Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth*, and will help business, labour and government work more effectively together to meet the province's economic challenges and capture opportunities at a strategic, province-wide level. There is real power when people work together on common shared goals to advance a collective agenda, rather than focusing on issues that divide them.

The core of this new initiative is a Strategic Partnership Forum held among the three groups and chaired by the Premier. A highly successful first session of the Forum was held on March 8, 2002 building on significant work that has been ongoing for some time on this front. My Government will work diligently with our labour and business partners to identify and address key challenges and opportunities which will benefit from a collective tripartite approach.

Partnership with Aboriginal Peoples

My Government is committed to working with the federal government to resolve issues of concern to our Aboriginal peoples. The social pressures and problems of substance abuse which plague many Aboriginal communities are a tragedy that cannot be ignored. My Government pledges to work in partnership with Aboriginal peoples, and in collaboration with the federal government, to empower and assist them in overcoming their tremendous challenges.

In the coming year, My Government will continue to negotiate with the Labrador Inuit Association and the Innu Nation on their respective land claims. My Government intends to sign the first self-government and land claims agreement in this province, which will be a watershed event in our history, because this is the right thing to do and will be good for all of the province.

Improving Transportation Infrastructure

My Government has sought commitments from the federal government to improve the province's transportation infrastructure including a proposal to the federal government for additional funding for the province's highways. Of particular significance, and in keeping with the aspirations of the people of Labrador and commitments to the region, My Government will ensure the completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway. My Government expects the federal government to increase funding to address the poor condition of its federal wharves and harbours in this province. My Government will also be initiating a new vessel replacement and refurbishment program on a cost-effective basis to address the needs of our ferry operations.

Air access is a nationally debated issue in which the province has great interest. My Government has established a Cabinet Committee on Air Policy to provide advice on commercial air presence and air access to and from various parts of the province. My Government believes that decisive national action is needed to improve the quality of air service and ensure reasonable rates. My Government will demand action from the federal government to address air access issues in this province.

Equalization Program Reform

My Government is a strong supporter of the principle of equalization but is concerned about whether the present program will serve our province well in the future. My Government believes that we must reject any vision of Canada that accepts "have not" status for some provinces as the natural order of things. My Government will fight to achieve Equalization Program reform so that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can receive their fair share from Confederation, particularly on natural resource revenues.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Health Care

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians place high value on their health and well-being. This is why My Government is committed to ensuring that people have timely access to quality health care services. It is about making the right choices so that we have the right people, in the right place, at the right time so that the health care system can respond effectively to the needs of our citizens. Last fall My Government held a series of regional health forums across the province. The input which people provided will enable My Government to shape the principles which will guide health care decision-making in the future.

Strategic Health Plan

In the coming months, My Government will release a new Strategic Health Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador. This Plan will outline priorities for action, strategic objectives and specific performance targets.

The Plan will be built around three goals which address: the health status of the population; the quality, accessibility and sustainability of health and community services; and the participation of individuals, families and communities in their own health and well-being.

Wellness

My Government believes that we need to stop waiting until people get sick and start focusing more on helping them to stay healthy in the first place. My Government will continue to provide information to, and opportunities for, citizens of the province to enable them to choose healthier lifestyles, including increased physical activity, better nutrition and reduced levels of smoking.

Teen Smoking

My Government has taken a proactive role in promoting non-smoking behaviours. It has strengthened anti-tobacco legislation by restricting the sale of tobacco products to minors. On January 1, 2002, Newfoundland and Labrador became the first province in Canada to prohibit smoking in food establishments and other public places frequented by children.

But more needs to be done to combat smoking by teens. And My Government will do more to ensure that young people commit their lives to productive and healthy endeavours rather than to smoking. My Government will continue to support the Alliance for Control of Tobacco and work closely with its Teen Tobacco Team to identify and act on the best approaches to getting the stop smoking message to our youth. My Government is committed to making a difference and to achieving results. After all, those who will hold our future will need

strong lungs for their voices to be heard.

Health Charter

My Government is making a commitment today to every citizen of the province to develop a Health Charter. This Charter will provide clear commitments to individuals on accessibility to quality health care. It will also establish an understanding of the importance of a person's own responsibility in achieving optimal health. This Health Charter will be developed by My Government with input from the public and from health sector stakeholders.

Sustainability - A Continuing Priority

The cost of providing health care continues to place significant pressure on public finances. My Government believes that health services must be financially sustainable over the long term so that people can continue to have access to quality health care. An ongoing commitment to efficiency and innovation is necessary in the delivery of health services to ensure that human and financial resources are always applied to the areas of greatest need. My Government will work with health boards to ensure our health system operates on a sustainable basis.

Need for Further Federal Funding

My Government will continue to press the federal government to live up to its commitments in funding health care. My Government calls for effective federal leadership in this area and a meaningful partnership among all governments to ensure that Medicare remains a viable and cost-effective program.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Children and Youth

My Government believes in the value of investing in children. My Government recognizes the importance of the early years and the valuable and crucial role families and communities play in supporting children. My Government also understands the importance of helping young people make a successful transition to adulthood. It is indeed a fact that the children of today will be the leaders of tomorrow.

Early Childhood Development

This past year, My Government announced a five-year Early Childhood Development initiative. The province's program, *Stepping into the Future*, has been designed to specifically meet the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador, and was developed in consultation with early childhood development stakeholders.

As with other areas of public policy, My Government intends to be accountable to the public for its investments in this area. Work has begun on a framework for the development of comparable indicators. My Government will report the results of its investments to the public on a regular basis.

Education

Education continues to be a major priority for My Government. An integrated approach to improving literacy has been developed, including a comprehensive testing program to identify and diagnose reading

difficulties and the allocation of reading specialists for every school board.

My Government has moved quickly to implement the recommendations of the *Ministerial Panel Report on Education Delivery in the Classroom*. All of the 86 recommendations have been, or are in the process of being, implemented. My Government will complete the implementation of the Report's recommendations in the coming year, especially those that refer to increasing instructional time for students to improve student achievement.

My Government will increase online learning opportunities available for students, with special emphasis on students in rural and isolated parts of the province. These opportunities, delivered through new Internet-based technology, will provide students with the tools they need to succeed.

Student Aid

My Government recognizes the debt which students, particularly those from rural areas, acquire through the financing of their post-secondary education must be better managed through the combined efforts of government, students and institutions. To this end, My Government will work with students on making tuition more affordable and helping them obtain meaningful work experience in career-related fields. My Government will also work with Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic and other institutions to give students more recognition for prior learning and to increase credit transfer options. My Government soon will be announcing a new Student Loans Program which will improve existing debt reduction measures, reduce loan defaults and help address student debt accumulation.

Violence Prevention Initiative

Through continuation of the Violence Prevention Initiative which commenced in 2000, My Government reaffirms its commitment to improving programs and policies for women, children, the elderly and other groups of individuals vulnerable to violence. The partners in this Initiative include the community, at the regional and provincial levels, and several government departments and agencies.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The Economy

Economic strength and quality of life are inextricably linked. Only a strong economy can provide the means to support vital services such as accessible health care and quality education. Only a strong economy supports assistance for children, the elderly and the most vulnerable in our society.

As we move forward, it is clear that a new and changing Newfoundland and Labrador is emerging. It is a Newfoundland and Labrador of enterprising, educated and self-reliant people. It is a Newfoundland and Labrador that is working together to create a competitive economy and a balanced social agenda. It is a province made up of people confident in their future.

My Government's *Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth* is working. It is an action-oriented agenda with over 130 specific priorities for action. And fully two-thirds of the priorities for action focus on the challenges confronting rural Newfoundland and Labrador - making it a strong rural agenda as well.

Our economy has been growing. It has become much more diversified. Employment is the most important indicator of a healthy economy. Employment is increasing and reached an all-time historic high of 211,300 in 2001. Newfoundland and Labrador has led or has been among the leading provinces in economic growth and new employment creation for the past four years. Of the 24,000 jobs created since 1996, two-thirds have been created outside the North East Avalon region, showing continued strengthening of our rural economy. The trend line for all major economic indicators is projected to move in the right direction in the years ahead.

But more needs to be done and more will be done. We need to bring the unemployment rate down even further. We need to ensure that all regions of our province share in the ongoing economic recovery.

Investment Prospecting

In the *Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth*, My Government committed to develop an enhanced and focused investment prospecting effort to capture growing national and international investor interest in our province. My Government will work in partnership with the private sector to develop the right tools and incentives to be a truly competitive force in the marketplace. My Government intends to outline a new and refocused investment prospecting strategy to enhance our investment attraction efforts for the province. My Government remains steadfast in its commitment to make the right decisions to ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be the right place for business.

Rediscovering Our Offshore

Petroleum developments will continue to drive our economy well into the future. The hard work and

investments of the past have yielded two producing fields - Hibernia and Terra Nova - and a strong local industry. White Rose has been given regulatory approval to proceed and now awaits a decision by the project proponents. We must now focus on discovering new resources to fuel the next generation of developments. New fields await discovery in relatively unexplored areas of our offshore. The Jeanne d'Arc Basin defines our industry today. New areas, such as the Flemish Pass and South Whale Basin, will be our tomorrow. Already we are seeing industry move in this direction.

We are now on the verge of opening up vast areas of our offshore to exploration. In a matter of weeks, a federal tribunal will determine a line to separate the offshore areas of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. No matter where that line may fall, it will be good news for both provinces. Jurisdictional certainty will lead to exploration, discovery and development.

My Government is committed to working with industry to encourage increased and aggressive exploration of our offshore. That means taking steps to improve our competitive position world-wide, increasing regulatory efficiency and heightening promotional efforts. My Government will work hard to secure the future growth of this industry and our province.

Forum on the Offshore

My Government is committed to a strategic focus in developing the offshore industry, particularly with respect to the natural gas industry. My Government will hold a Forum on the Offshore involving government, industry and labour, and other important stakeholders. The Forum will provide guidance to My Government on the potential to expedite natural gas development for the benefit of the people of the province.

Major Projects

Major projects such as Voisey's Bay and the Lower Churchill development can generate significant employment and economic activity for Labrador as well as other parts of the province. My Government will continue to pursue major projects that maximize economic benefits and opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is My Government's mandate from the people of the province.

Small Business

My Government also recognizes that a balance needs to be struck between larger scale development projects and the need to foster the growth of small enterprises in all areas of the province. My Government committed in its *Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth* to give greater priority and emphasis to small business development and has implemented a number of new initiatives in recent years to stimulate this important part of our economy. A Small Business Advisory Council will be established to accelerate this effort and provide ongoing advice and support to My Government in this area.

Coordinated Approach to Address Foreign Overfishing

The fishery has been the backbone of our economy for centuries and it will be a central part of our future. Although the fishing industry has undergone significant structural change in the last decade, some communities have yet to recover from the collapse of groundfish resources. One of the key challenges the industry is now facing is the return of foreign overfishing on the Grand Banks, which will compromise the recovery of several key groundfish stocks. My Government will work with the industry and the union to develop a coordinated approach to

ensure that the Government of Canada acts decisively, and is successful, in convincing foreign countries to adhere to strict conservation practices.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The Environment

My Government recognizes the links between the quality of our environment, the strength of our economy and the health of our people.

Natural Heritage Stewardship

The rugged beauty and wildlife diversity of our province have sustained our unique culture for centuries, fostering in our people an intense love for and interest in the outdoors. To this day, our people rely heavily on the wildlife on our land, and the fish in our waters, and new generations stand ready to pursue these traditions of their ancestors. Demonstrating and facilitating leadership in this area is of paramount importance to My Government.

We must not take our natural heritage, nor our vibrant traditions that are centered upon it, for granted. We must act prudently, but decisively, in striking a balance between development and environmental protection. In this regard, My Government is determined to act to ensure that the province's natural heritage wealth is not squandered, but managed for generations to come.

In keeping with this approach, My Government has established a Ministerial Council on the Use of Outdoor

Resources and, in the coming year, My Government intends to dedicate substantive resources towards improved wildlife science. My Government will establish at Memorial University a new Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Science, an innovative partnering arrangement that will coordinate opportunities and activities associated with natural science, research and development. My Government will also continue to press the federal government to live up to its responsibility for inland fisheries management and enhancement.

Safe Drinking Water

My Government will continue to implement its action plan to improve drinking water quality. It will increase the number of inspectors. It will increase the frequency of water testing. It will continue to provide funding to municipalities to install or upgrade chlorination equipment and provide appropriate training for municipal operators. And My Government will keep the public informed of the results of its testing program, consistent with its openness and accountability agenda.

Solid Waste Management

In last year's Throne Speech, My Government articulated its intention to develop a long-term strategy to address waste management and to seek the views of individuals, communities and other interested parties on that strategy. Extensive consultations occurred last summer and fall and a final report, *A Call to Action on Environmental Protection*, which provided recommendations for Government on how to proceed with modern waste management, was publicly released.

The people of the province have told us that we must improve our waste management practices. Citizens

have also told us that waste management is the collective responsibility of individuals, communities, businesses, industries, and government. My Government will be outlining a multi-year, province-wide waste management strategy with the overall objective being to divert 50 per cent of the materials currently going to disposal by 2010, and to phase out the use of existing incinerators with the implementation of modern waste management systems.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Looking to the Future

In the past decade, My Government has had to face many challenges. In the early 1990s, our people understood hardship first-hand as the groundfishery collapsed and governments reined in spending. My Government met those challenges head-on, and with its new leadership will emerge from the lingering doubts these challenges created.

This province is at a point where its people are able to reach out to the future and touch opportunity with their collective fingertips. Through its action agenda, My Government will support the people of the province in extending their reach and grasping future opportunities, many of which are based in Labrador, in a manner which is unparalleled.

With this decade serving as a fresh beginning, we are able to stand proudly with a bright future ahead of us. My Government will commit its energies to help each Newfoundlander and Labradorian boldly step forward with a confidence that demonstrates our true capacity for excellence around the world. The people of the province can look forward to the next decade, knowing that it will belong to Newfoundland and Labrador.

My Government has built its record to date on positive change, and it will continue to provide concrete results in the future. Today, My Government has set out its agenda for the coming year. It is bold. It is ambitious. It is also one against which the people of the province can judge us. Today is also an appropriate time to reflect on how our province has changed in the five decades since Confederation.

Newfoundland and Labrador's entry into Canada in 1949 was an extraordinary event. Few would disagree that much has changed in the province since Confederation. We are a more educated people. Our demographic profile has changed dramatically. The fishery today bears no similarity to the fishery of 50 years ago. We have become more diverse and, because of our willingness to embrace advances in information technology, we are no longer constrained by geography. Our youth are global in their thinking and their views. For them, the Internet has all but eliminated borders and cultural differences.

The international achievements of the College of the North Atlantic, and indeed the reference to "the North Atlantic", demonstrates how we see ourselves in a globalized world. The 10-year, $500 million contract which the College signed with the State of Qatar illustrates the types of opportunities available to Newfoundland and Labrador in the global economy.

For the past 10 years, My Government has laid the groundwork for government to move forward with its people. Education reform, sound fiscal management and social and economic planning initiatives have prepared government to manage for the future. It is timely for us to reflect, and to look at ourselves and the goals we share for our society.

Royal Commission

To this end, My Government will establish a Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada.

The Commission's mandate will be to involve the people of the province in seeking a broad consensus on a vision to position ourselves in the global community, to renew our relationship with Canada, to complete a critical analysis of our strengths and weaknesses and to provide direction for the decade to come. It will address, among other things, who we were when we joined Canada in 1949, how we have changed over the past five decades, our relationship with other governments, our contribution as a society and where we see ourselves in the future. The Commission will have a broad mandate to undertake necessary research and conduct public consultations in the province. Further details regarding the Royal Commission and its Terms of Reference will be announced in the near future.

We are at a crossroads. A review of where we have come from and our present circumstances will help us create the future that we as a people want and deserve.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Our future is bright and full of promise. We can take pride in our accomplishments but we shall not rest on them. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know where My Government is heading. They know its priorities. They know that it has made, and will continue to make, the right choices.

There is no doubt that Newfoundland and Labrador's best days lie ahead. My Government will remain focused in order to meet the high expectations we have of ourselves, and our people have of their government.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Estimates of Expenditures will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty. I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence your labours in this Fourth Session of the Forty-Fourth General Assembly. May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.